



The Virtual Activist

A Training Course

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This guide is also available to be downloaded in the following formats: [ASCII \(text only\)](#), and [regular HTML document](#). This

document last modified 08/27/2007 16:41:45.

NetAction's Quick Reference Checklists

Download and print these checklists for quick reference or distribution as workshop handouts.

- [Is Your Action Alert Ready to Circulate in Cyberspace?](#) (also in [Word](#) and [PDF](#))
- [How To Create A "Bcc" Email List](#) (also in [Word](#) and [PDF](#))
- [Tips for Effective Online Media](#) (also in [Word](#) and [PDF](#))

A Note About Using This Site

This training course includes links to many other sites, which we are using to provide you with examples of how the Internet is being used for activism. We recommend that you BOOKMARK THIS PAGE now so that you can return to it easily as you make your way through the curriculum. Or, if you prefer, you can use the BACK button to return to the site after leaving it to view one of the examples we have linked to it.

We welcome your comments, questions, and suggestions. Feel free to contact us at info@netaction.org.

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NetAction is a project of The Tides Center, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Many thanks go to [Michael Stein](#), Judi Clark, Theresa Chen, Jasmine Li, Josh Dimon, Jennifer Kanouse, and Jill Herschman for their help compiling this information.

Part 1: Introduction

The Internet is a powerful tool that allows us to expand our networks by identifying and communicating with like-minded people anywhere in the world. It enables us to disseminate information widely, cheaply, and instantaneously. Although you'll need some special skills to build and maintain a Web site, email is easily mastered even if you have little or no technical expertise. If you can read and write and your computer has a modem, you can be a Virtual Activist!

With its blinking graphics, streaming video, and interactive capabilities, the Web gets a lot more attention than plain old text-based email. But don't let email's simplicity fool you. For activists and nonprofit organizations engaged in advocacy, email is the tool of choice.

In this virtual classroom, NetAction will teach you how to use email and the Web as effective, inexpensive, and efficient tools for organizing, outreach, and advocacy.

The Big Picture

There are currently more than 100 million Americans using the Internet, and that number is expected to continue to grow. A recent study by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that 35 percent of U.S. citizens currently use the Internet to inform themselves on politics, and this number is also increasing. Advocacy organizations working to influence public policy will increasingly need to incorporate the Internet into their outreach and organizing efforts.

The Pew report is on the Web at: <http://www.pewinternet.org/reports/toc.asp?Report=22>.

Technology is a tool that can be used strategically to enhance grassroots organizing and outreach efforts related to political campaigns and public policy issues. It is most effective as a supplement to -- not a substitute for -- traditional organizing and outreach techniques. So don't stop organizing rallies, house parties and press conferences, keep making those phone calls, and continue building your membership through direct mail and/or telemarketing.

What do you need to get started with Internet advocacy? Surprisingly little. You'll need a computer, of course, but don't worry if it doesn't have all the latest bells and whistles. Internet access and email software are all you really need. Even a Web site isn't absolutely necessary, although having one is certainly a good idea.

Suppose your organization wants to publicize a recent legislative breakthrough that drastically affects a current campaign on which your organization is working. Choosing from traditional organizing and outreach techniques, you may choose to hold a press conference or issue a press release to alert the media. You may also want to write an article for your organization's quarterly newsletter and prepare a list of talking points to distribute to staff members and volunteers who will be contacting the media.

But you can also use the Internet, your Web site, email lists and news groups in your advocacy campaign. For example, email would be a faster and cheaper way to mobilize volunteers. And posting information to your Web site will allow you to reach more potential supporters at no additional cost. Before we discuss the use of email and Web-based tools in detail, let's look at these tools in

perspective.

Active and passive tools

It is important to understand the difference between active and passive techniques for communicating electronically. The Internet is a global network of computers that communicate with each other over another network -- the telecommunications system. Computers use the Internet to "talk" to each other in much the same way people use the telephone network to talk to each other.

Although many people think of the Web as the Internet, the Web is actually just one part of it. Web sites are simply documents that are housed on a specific computer. When you visit a particular Web site -- such as [NetAction's](http://NetAction.org) -- your computer is using the telephone network to communicate electronically with the computer where the document named www.netaction.org is located.

Email is more like a telephone call. When you send an email message to your sister, the network of computers that make up the Internet carries your electronic "words" from your computer to your sister's computer in much the same way that the network of telephone wires carries your voice from your telephone to your sister's telephone.

Email is much more widely used than the Web, and is a far more effective tool for outreach. When you send email, whether it is a private message to one individual or an electronic newsletter to a list with hundreds of subscribers, you are "pushing" information to other Internet users. Your message gets delivered to the in-boxes of everyone you send it to. You can't be certain that everyone who receives it will read it, of course, but in a later lesson we will discuss strategies to increase the likelihood that your message will be read and acted upon.

In contrast, when you create a Web site, you are placing a document on one computer and giving it a unique "address." People who know the address can visit it, but the actual document stays on that one computer.

So email is an "active" way to communicate your message. Web pages, on the other hand, are passive. People who visit your Web site will only see information that you post on your Web site. If you think of the Internet as an "information superhighway," email is the package that gets transported by truck to the recipient's home, while Web sites are the billboards you pass when you're driving down the highway (as depicted in this graphic used with the permission of [CARAL](http://CARAL.org)).



Now that it's clearer how active and passive tools work differently, can you name some of the active tools that an advocacy group could use on a particular campaign? And how might the more passive Web tools be used?

Maximum impact

Email is by far the most effective online advocacy tool because it is active, immediate, and widely used. But the effectiveness of email outreach can often be enhanced when email and Web-based tools are used together. For example, the children's and families' rights organization FamiliesUSA recently sent out the following email message to its action alert list:

"Friends: On behalf of Families USA and our many national cosponsors, I'd like to invite you to join us on January 25-27 at 'Health Action 2001.' Last year, this national grassroots meeting brought together over 500 health advocates from across the country to learn about breaking issues, share ideas with old and new friends and colleagues, and get recharged for the challenging year ahead..."

You can get all the details at: <http://familiesusa.org/pubs/conbro.htm>."

Note that the alert includes a hyperlink to FamiliesUSA's Health Action 2001 Web site. A hyperlink is text that contains a link to another document that is displayed when the reader clicks on it. This is a technique that is used frequently by activists and advocacy organizations to integrate email and Web-based advocacy tools. To see how it works, click on the hyperlink in the above action alert. (When you've done that, use the "Back" button in your Web browser to return to this page.)

After looking at the email alert, can you think of some ways that your organization could link email messages and Web-based tools? You'll find plenty of examples in [Part 3](#).

Suggested reading: "How the Internet is Reshaping the Rules for Policy Campaigns" at: <http://www.delanepolicy.com/publications/html/campaigns.htm>.

Part 2A: Using Email for Outreach, Organizing, and Advocacy -- The Fundamentals

When should you use the Internet as part of your organizing and advocacy work? When you need an immediate response, want to

contact a lot of people as quickly as possible, and don't have a lot of money to spend on printing and postage. Virtually all of the written materials that your organization produces can be adapted for electronic distribution via email, the Web, or both. If you're not already using email as part of your advocacy work, here are some tips to help you get started.

- Collect email addresses from your members, supporters and volunteers, the media, your contacts in legislative offices, your funders and anyone else you communicate with regularly. Include a space for email addresses in your membership sign-up forms, newsletter subscription forms, and fundraising reply cards.
- If your organization publishes a newsletter, offer your members the option of receiving it electronically. Encourage them to switch by reminding them that your organization will save money.
- Train your staff, board and volunteers to regularly collect email addresses from colleagues, friends and supporters and feed those into the email newsletter list. Nominate one month as "Email Collection Month" and do an all-out push to increase your lists.
- If your organization has a Web site where visitors can sign up to volunteer, to subscribe to a newsletter or action alert, or to donate money, be sure to ask for an email address as well as other contact information.
- If your organization has a table at a conference, rally, or other event, include space for an email address on your sign-up sheet.
- If you distribute press releases to the media, start sending them by email instead of fax. (Also, be sure to add online media outlets to your distribution list.)
- Use email to communicate with staff consultants in legislative offices. (But not with lawmakers, for reasons we'll explain later.)
- Establish and promote an email action alert list, using the tools we discuss in this Virtual Activist training.

Although our focus in this lesson is on email activism, once you get started you'll discover that there are many other ways in which technology can enhance your organization's communications. Many people prefer to receive information electronically because it reduces the amount of paper they accumulate. (See [Tips for Effective Online Media](#) for more on using email for public relations and media advocacy.)

Suppose you wanted to design an Internet outreach effort to supplement your traditional techniques. To get the word out, your organization has planned a press conference and written a press release. You have plans to write an article for your newsletter, and you are actively preparing a list of talking points for staff and volunteers to use in communicating with the media. What Internet tools can you use to enhance the effectiveness of your effort? You can publish a copy of your press release on your Web site, distribute an email version of your newsletter, and/or post an electronic copy of the newsletter on your Web site.

Elements of email advocacy

Think of email advocacy as an extension of your grassroots organizing efforts. Email action alerts are typically used for strategic purposes in conjunction with issue campaigns that have clearly defined goals. Let's take a look at a real action alert that the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), a national nonprofit constitutional liberties advocacy organization, sent out recently:

Subject: ACLU Action List: Defend the Rights of People with Disabilities!

Defend the Rights of People with Disabilities: Ironically enough, on the ten-year anniversary of the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the House of Representatives is considering legislation proposed by Rep. Mark Foley (R-FL) that would circumvent the goal and meaning of the ADA.

Entitled the "ADA Notification Act" (HR 3590), this legislation would sanction individuals who did not first notify a business of an ADA violation and then wait three months before filing a lawsuit. Supporters of this bill claim that it would ensure that businesses are given adequate notice, ignoring the fact that the ADA has been in effect for ten years.

The U.S. Justice department provides ample information and training for businesses to make sure that they are in compliance, including a toll-free ADA information line that handles more than 100,000 calls a year. There is no need for to provide businesses more time to discriminate against people with disabilities.

Take Action! You can read more about this legislation and send a FREE FAX to your Representative from our action alert at: <http://www.aclu.org/action/ada106.html>

ONLINE RESOURCES FROM THE ACLU NATIONAL OFFICE

ACLU Freedom Network Web Page: <http://www.aclu.org>
America Online: keyword ACLU

ACLU Newsfeed
American Civil Liberties Union National Office
125 Broad Street
New York, New York 10004

In sending out this message, the ACLU achieved its goal of reaching out to gear up opposition to the ADA Notification Act. The action alert also served the secondary purpose of publicizing the ACLU's website and contact information.

Let's see how another organization uses email action alerts. This alert comes from CARAL (California Abortion and Reproductive

Rights Action League):

Subject: CARAL email action list

Dear Friends,

As the November election quickly approaches, it becomes more and more urgent for CARAL to reach as many pro-choice individuals as possible with information about key reproductive rights information.

We need your help!

Please COPY the message below, paste it into an email message, and send it to all your pro-choice friends, family and colleagues. Feel free to add or change anything to the message to personalize it. (Please be sure to list them in the "bcc" field when you are addressing your email message!)

And if you are not on the CARAL action alert list yourself, please use the handy link below to sign up today.

Thank you for your help protecting reproductive rights.

Yours for Choice

Dear Friends,

As you know, protecting women's reproductive rights is very important to me. And with the upcoming elections, I believe that it's more important than ever for pro-choice individuals like us to be informed and able to take action.

I am a member of the CARAL email action alert list, and I want to ask you to join this list too. You will get email updates with essential information and quick, easy action items that you can take to protect and promote Choice.

All you have to do is click on this link: <mailto:samplenonprofit.org?Subject=PutMeOnYourMailingList>

Please do this today!

Thank you.

This is an excellent example of how email can be used strategically to build your organization's base of support. The message is short and simple: CARAL needs to reach more pro-choice voters before the election. The requested action is easy to accomplish: copy the message, paste it into an email message form, and send it to everyone you know who shares your pro-choice sentiments. CARAL also makes it as easy as possible for your friends and colleagues to subscribe to the action alert list by including a "mailto" hyperlink. We'll discuss "mailto" hyperlinks in more detail later.

Preparing an email action alert

Before the Internet was widely used, activists and advocacy organizations distributed action alerts by mail and fax. Preparing an email action alert is similar. But since email has the potential to reach a significantly larger audience, there are some special considerations. NetAction has prepared a simple checklist to help you determine if your action alert is ready to circulate in cyberspace:

- **Will readers know who sent the action alert?** It's important to clearly identify your organization as the source of the action alert. (If you're sending out an alert as an individual, you'll need to identify yourself.)
- **Will readers know how to contact your organization?** Always include your organization's email address, postal address, Web site address, phone number and fax number in action alerts. (Or your personal contact information if you're distributing an alert as an individual.) Although not essential, it is helpful to include the name, title and phone number of someone in your organization who can be contacted if readers have questions.
- **Will readers want to open the message?** The subject line can determine whether someone opens and reads your message, or deletes it unread. Make the subject line compelling or provocative -- and never send an action alert with a blank subject line.
- **Will readers know if the action alert is timely?** Always include the date that your action alert is distributed and the date by which action is requested. (And don't forget the year!) Outdated action alerts can circulate online for years, and many do because the preparer failed to include a date.
- **Will readers understand why action is important?** Include clear, concise background information and the key point(s) to communicate. Keep layout simple, use ascii text, avoid jargon, use short paragraphs, section headings, bullets and simple formatting to mark the start and end of the alert. Don't assume the reader will be familiar with the issue. Include hyperlink pointers to Web sites where additional background information can be found.
- **Will readers know what action to take?** Be specific about how the reader can help. Include the postal address or phone number if you are asking readers to write letters or make phone calls. Include a hyperlink pointer to online information to help readers locate their elected representatives.

NOTE: There are many online resources to locate elected officials. [Project Vote Smart](#) is one of the most comprehensive. In addition to elected representatives at the local, state and national level, the site tracks the candidates in thousands of races.

- **Are you sure of the facts?** Electronic action alerts can literally go around the world in minutes. Since you won't know exactly who sees your alert, factual errors aren't easily corrected. Make sure the information is correct before you hit the "send" key. If

you're drafting an alert in response to information provided to your organization, make sure it's from a trusted source, or can be verified by a trusted source, before sending it out. If you're forwarding information from another organization, contact the organization to verify that they sent it before forwarding it to others.

NOTE: Almost everyone has received an outdated or fake alert at one time or another, often from a well-meaning friend or colleague. Unless you are absolutely sure it's accurate, don't forward an alert. If you suspect an alert isn't real, check one of the sites that monitors Internet hoaxes, <http://www.nonprofit.net/hoax/hoax.html>, or <http://hoaxbusters.ciac.org/HBUrbanMyths.shtml>.

- **Are you building your base of support?** Always include information on how readers can subscribe to or unsubscribe from your action alert list. It's also a good idea to include information on how to join your organization.

There are some excellent online resources that provide more detailed information about how to prepare an action alert. See ["Writing Effective Action Alerts by OneNorthWest"](#) for a brief, 10-step guide, and ["Designing Effective Action Alerts for the Internet"](#) by Phil Agre of UCLA's Department of Information Sciences.

Prof. Agre is also the author of ["Against Chain-Letter Petitions on the Internet."](#), which discusses the problems with email petitions and sign-on letters circulated by email. Email petitions and sign-on letters have proven to be problematic, and should be avoided.

Distributing an email action alert

When your action alert is ready, you'll be distributing it to the people who subscribed to your alert list. (We will review the tools that you can use to set up your action alert list later.) But your organization's subscriber list isn't your only option. There are thousands of email discussion lists and news groups on the Internet.

When you post the same action alert to several discussion lists or news groups, it's called cross-posting. This can be a very effective way to expand the universe of Internet users who receive your alert. But be careful to target only appropriate lists. If you plan to cross-post your action alerts, you'll have to identify and subscribe to the lists and news groups ahead of time to become familiar with the topics they address.

See [What is Usenet](#), [The USENET FAQ](#), and [Another View](#) for a more detailed discussion of newsgroups.

How do you identify the news groups and discussion lists that might be appropriate places to cross-post your action alert? One way is to ask your own subscribers, as well as your friends and colleagues, for suggestions. Or you can locate appropriate lists by surfing other organizations' Web sites to see if they have lists focused on similar issues. For example, if your organization is concerned with welfare issues, you might try posting your alert to news groups that deal with poverty and homelessness. There are also search tools available for a more systematic approach. For email discussion lists try the Liszt directory of mailing lists at <http://www.liszt.com>. For news groups try <http://www.dejanews.com/>. It's also possible to search the commercial list service Web sites, like Topica <http://www.topica.com>.

CAUTION: Take care to understand fully the topic and the "environment" of a news group. It's a bad idea under any circumstances to post your alert to a news group you haven't been reading, or an email list you aren't already subscribed to. You need to be familiar with the news group or list to make sure that your action alert is appropriate to post. Otherwise, it could be considered spam (an Internet term for unsolicited junk email) and result in complaints from other subscribers to the list owner, or to your ISP.

There may also be complaints if you post your email action alert to several lists with overlapping subscribers, since people might wind up with three or four copies of the same action alert. If you get a lot of complaints from people who receive multiple copies, reduce the number of lists and news groups that you cross-post to.

Do's and Don'ts

The key to success in distributing email action alerts is as much in knowing what NOT to do as in knowing what to do. Here is NetAction's quick reference list of Do's and Don'ts for email action alerts:

DO:

- Keep the text short and focused.
- Make the subject line compelling or provocative.
- Include all your contact information: phone, address, fax, email, URL.
- Include phone, fax and/or postal addresses of targeted decision-makers.
- Post only to relevant discussion lists and news groups.
- Use ascii-friendly symbols to break up text (i.e. # or ^ or =).
- Test your alert before distributing it by sending it to yourself.

DON'TS:

- Ask people to send email to elected officials.
- Spam individuals or lists.
- Use wide margins.
- Post to discussion lists or news groups on unrelated issues.
- Leave the subject line blank.

NOTE: NetAction is frequently asked why we recommend not sending email to decision makers. At this time, email is not an effective way to communicate with most decision makers because few of them read it and they have no way of knowing whether the messages they receive are from constituents. It's more effective to phone or write a letter and either mail it or fax it.

Cyberspace Networking

Because of the borderless nature of the Internet, it can be a powerful tool for networking. Organizations with similar concerns can form coalitions and alliances that literally span the globe. The following sites are sponsored by coalitions that developed as a result of cyberspace networking.

Forming Cyberspace coalitions:

Example: Coalition for Networked Information <http://www.cni.org/>

Example: Global Internet Liberty Campaign <http://www.gilc.org/>

Example: People's Global Action <http://www.agp.org/agp/index.html>

Example: Internet Free Expression Alliance <http://www.ifea.net/>

Intranets and electronic networks

Intranets and electronic networks are common in workplaces. They enable a specific group of computer users to communicate online, but they are not part of the larger Internet. America Online is an example of a commercial intranet. If you subscribe to AOL, you have access to a variety of forums, discussion groups, and online services that are not accessible to the general public. Non-profit organizations and grassroots groups can also set up these types of networks.

Example: Institute for Global Communications Internet <http://www.igc.org/igc/gateway/index.html>

See [IDM Intranet FAQ](#)

Virtu-odexes

We have physical rolodexes on our desks, and many have contact databases or online versions of our family, friends and colleagues. A "virtuo-dex" (a newly created term) extends our online "rolodex" to our online contacts, sharing our information with each other.

Sometimes it's "who you know" that's important, but other times it's "friends of who you know." There are commercial tools (like Six Degrees) that help create networks of people and their friends, relatives, and colleagues--networks where you can see the relationships among everyone. Building and allowing others to use your network enriches the whole community and helps people find others who are connected to their work and interests. Of course there are privacy considerations in this world--Six Degrees has privacy statements posted online.

See: Six Degrees <http://www.sixdegrees.com/>

Collaborative Discussion Tools

The hotword of the day is "community" -- everyone wants to build or be part of an online "community." Non-profits are their own community with common interests: fundraising, advocacy, membership, and others. Your membership is another community, and your organization is representing and addressing their interests. We have seen many ways (above) to reach out to your members. However, some organizations want to be a little more interactive.

There are two forms of interactivity: immediate, no archives, often referred to as chat or chat rooms, and nearly-immediate, sometimes archived for later reference and participation, often called Web forums, bulletin boards, or online conferences.

Example: Yahoo's Messenger (also commercial service) <http://messenger.yahoo.com/>

Example: E-groups (a commercial service--check their privacy policy!) <http://www.egroups.com/>

Chat and IRC

Chat is a form of communication which allows immediate interaction on the Internet. The earliest form was Internet Relay Chat (IRC), a text-based communications network. Now, there are newer Internet technologies which make it possible for a group of people to meet and converse online. With chat technology, all conversations take place in *real time*. That's why IRC has been used extensively for live coverage of world events, news, sports commentary, etc. For activists, it can be a useful tool for convening online meetings, debates, conferences, and town halls.

As a communication tool, chat is somewhere between a personal phone call and an announcement over the radio. [Yahoo's Chat Help file](#) has some useful tips for using chat appropriately.

Example: TalkCity (also commercial, uses java software) <http://www.talkcity.com/>

Instant Messaging

Another collaborative tool, which is growing in popularity, is instant messaging. Instant messaging applications require users to select their friends, so activists can use them to identify colleagues they might want to be in contact with when both are online at the same

time. In addition to sending instant text messages, some services make it possible for activists to send files and pictures instantly, and to conduct audio and/or video conferences. Users should be aware that not all instant messaging services are inter-operable. For example, if you are using Yahoo's messenger, you will not be able to send instant messages to someone using AOL's instant messenger. Hopefully, this won't always be the case.

Examples of instant messaging services include AOL's Instant Messenger, and ICQ (I Seek You) See how ICQ works at: <http://www.icq.com/icqtour/quicktour.html>

Part 2B: Using Email for Outreach, Organizing, and Advocacy -- Mailing Lists

Creating your email list

Email is a simple yet powerful tool that your organization can use to communicate with your supporters. It is fast, effective and highly affordable. You may already be in the habit of sending individual, personally composed email messages as part of the normal course of daily business. This discussion is about email lists, the practice of collecting large numbers of email addresses and storing them in a software program so that you can send electronic "mass mailings" to your supporters.

We're going to begin by reviewing the features available in the email software you are already using to send and receive individual messages, the email list services that are available through commercial Web sites, and the mailing list software that you can install and use in-house if your organization maintains its own "server." (A "server" is a computer that is connected to the Internet and used to host one or more Web sites.) We will also be reviewing the different ways you can set up and use **email lists** to communicate with your members, supporters, volunteers, and the media.

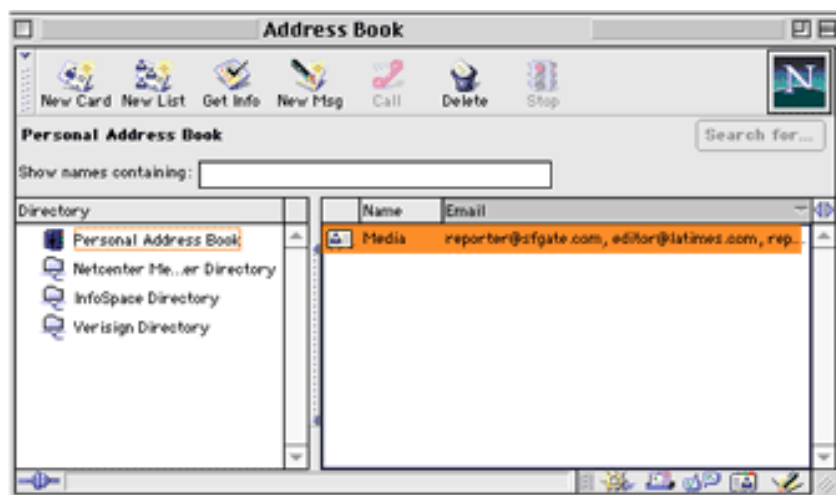
Using your regular email software

The simplest way to create and use email lists is to do it in-house using your regular email software. The most common products you might use are Qualcomm's Eudora, Microsoft Outlook, or Netscape Mail. This option is a good choice if your list has no more than a couple of hundred subscribers at most.

There are two common ways you send email with Eudora, Outlook, and other consumer software products. One is a personal note, addressed to an individual or to a small group of people. When you send an individual message, you type the recipient's email address in the "To" field, and you might also type a second recipient's address in the "Cc" field.

The other way -- which is useful for email activism -- is to use the address book feature in your email software program. This is a very useful tool for individual activists and for organizations in which the staff has little technical expertise. All email software programs have a feature that lets you set up an address book, and most will let you store hundreds or even thousands of names in the address book. Many people use this function to store the individual email address of friends and acquaintances. But it is also possible to use this function to create a simple announcement-only mailing list, which you can then use to distribute messages to a large number of people.

For example, if your organization periodically sends out press releases, you can set up a personalized address book, labeled "Media," that includes a list of the email addresses of all the reporters you know who are interested in the issues your organization is working on. Using the address book feature makes it possible to send the press release to all of the reporters at once, rather than emailing the message individually to each reporter. (See the example below.)



If you plan to use your address book to create an email list, you will need to know how to send email without disclosing the recipients' addresses. So if you haven't already been introduced to the "Bcc" field, it's time to get acquainted. ("Bcc" is an acronym for "blind carbon copy." Along with "Cc" for "carbon copy" the term has its origins in the days when typists made copies of documents by placing carbon-coated paper between sheets of regular paper before typing.)

At the top of every email message, you'll (usually) see a header with these fields:

```
=====
To:
From:
Subject:
Cc:
Bcc:
X-Attachment
=====
```

NOTE: In some email software, "Bcc" is not included in the default setting of the header display. In some versions of AOL's software, for example, you will have to open the address book and select "Blind Copy." If you don't see it, check the "Help" file or the User Manual that came with the software, or contact the company's support service by phone or email.

To send a press release to your "Media" address book, type "Media" in the "Bcc" field of the message header and put your own email address in the "To" field. That way, all of the reporters will receive the message, but only your email address will be disclosed. (And you'll get a copy of whatever you send, since your address will be in the "To" field.)

CAUTION: ALWAYS use the "Bcc" field if you are creating an email list in your address book. If you type the address book's name in the "To" or "Cc" field, all of the addresses will appear in the "To" field when the message is sent! There are two problems with this. First, some people prefer not to disclose their email address, and if the list has a lot of addresses the header will be long. This is annoying to some people because they have to scroll through screens full of addresses before they see the message.

Do you like seeing something like the following when you open an email message?

```
=====
From: "Jane Doe" <janedoe@hotmail.com >
To: James King <JKing@msn.com >, Alan Williams <awilliams@sirius.com >,
Dave Garrison <DG@aol.com >, "Jennifer Reilly" <Reilly@Reilly.com >,
"George Kelly" <Gkelly@pacbell.net >, "Thomas Jones" <tj54@aol.com >,
Gina Rogers <GinaR@uswest.com >, Dan Stevens <dans@yahoo.com >,
Vincent Davis <vince@att.net >, Ron Butler <ronbutler@dnai.com >,
"Marc Smith" <marc_smith@earthlink.net >, Tony Altura
<tonya@food.org >, "Jeffrey Carr" <carr867@aol.com >,
"Michael Milton" <mmilton@ucla.edu >,
Peter Boyd <pboyd@mindspring.com >, "Susan Smith" <ss@home.com >
=====
```

In contrast, here's what you'll see when you use the "Bcc" field to distribute a long list of names:

```
=====
Date: Mon, 11 Sep 2000 09:07:38 -0700
To: audrie@netaction.org
From: Audrie Krause
Subject: NetAction Urges Consumer Protection For Software Buyers
=====
```

Most Web email services, like YahooMail and HotMail, also offer address books as part of their free service. These can also be used to store large numbers of email addresses. If you use a Web email service, be sure to check if there is a limit to the number of email addresses that can be stored in the address book.

NOTE: NetAction uses and recommends Eudora. It's easy to use, less vulnerable to virus attacks than Microsoft Outlook, and can be downloaded for free from [Eudora's Web site](#).

Another important issue to deal with is backing up the email addresses that you have stored in your address book. A fatal crash of your computer's hard drive could wipe out months or years of collected addresses, so be sure to back up these names. If your organization has a network administrator, make arrangements to have this information backed up regularly. If not, copy the address book onto a floppy or zip disk regularly, or buy and use a commercial backup software product, such as Retrospect Express by [Dantz](#). If you are using a Web email service, learn how to back up your data, also.

Other email list software options

There are also some email list software products and services specifically for managing mailing lists. The two main types that you might use are Web-based Application Service Provider (ASP) services, and commercial list software for mail servers. These options are useful for lists with hundreds or thousands of names. Another alternative is eBase software, which we discuss in [Part 4](#).

Application Service Providers (ASP)

ASPs are commercial Internet companies that offer email list services over the Web, usually at no cost to the user. Application Service Providers that you might be familiar with are [Topica](#), [eGroups](#), and [ListBot](#) from Microsoft.

These services let you to set up an email list without having to install special list software, which we will discuss in the next section. The advantage of ASPs is that they automatically handle all the subscribing and unsubscribing for you. That means people will be able to join and leave the list without extra work on your part. This is particularly useful if you aren't going to individually review and approve every new subscriber.

ASPs may be a good choice for individual activists who want to set up email discussion lists, and for organizations in which a staff with limited technical expertise needs to manage multiple or large lists. You don't need much technical experience to manage lists that are set up through these services, you have more choices about how the list works, and you have access to technical support if you need it.

Another advantage of these services is that they automatically store all the messages on a Web site. (This is called an archive.) An archive is useful if you want to have a record of everything that has ever been posted to the list. You might want such a record so that new subscribers can read messages posted before they joined the list, or so that people can read the messages without having to subscribe to the list.

But there are also some important disadvantages to consider. Under the user agreements, if you use their services the ASPs will own your lists, any of your work that's posted to your lists, and the content of your list archive. This gives the ASP the right to do anything it wants with this information.

Also, because these services are free, the companies that offer them add a small advertisement header or footer to each message, similar to the ones you see if you get email from someone who uses YahooMail or HotMail for Internet service. While some people would rather not use a service with advertising, others consider it a reasonable price to pay for a free service. Here is an example of the type of advertisement you would see if you subscribed to an email list operated by Topica:

```
=====
T O P I C A The Email You Want. http://www.topica.com/t/16
Newsletters, Tips and Discussions on Your Favorite Topics
=====
```

Another downside of using one of these services is that you can't customize the list with your organization's domain name to indicate that the message was sent by your organization. (A domain name is what appears after the "www" on a Web site address. For example, "sierra.org" is the domain name of The Sierra Club.) Messages sent through an ASP list might have a header that looks like this:

```
=====
From: johndoe@yahoo.com
Subject: Support H.R. 2502!
Date: Wed, 5 Jul 2000 20:09:32 EDT
BestServHost: lists.best.com
Sender: actionalert-errors@lists.best.com
Reply-To: johndoe@yahoo.com
To: actionalert@lists.best.com
=====
```

When you customize the list name to match your organization's domain name, the message will have a header that identifies your organization by its domain name. So it might look something like this:

```
=====
Date: Wed, 5 Jul 2000 01:06:27 -0600 (MDT)
From: Audrie Krause
Subject: NetAction Notes No. 58
Sender: netaction-owner@netaction.org
Reply-To: audrie@netaction.org
=====
```

If you are thinking of using a service like Topica, eGroups or ListBot, you'll need to weigh the advantages against the disadvantages. If you decide to go ahead, be sure to ask how you can keep a backup of your email subscriber list. Like the database of your members' addresses and phone numbers, your email subscriber list is a valuable asset.

Commercial in-house email list software

Another way to set up a list is to install commercial list software on your organization's "server" computer. Some of these commercial products are free, and others have to be purchased. Commercial list software is not very user-friendly. So this is only a good option if your organization runs its own in-house mail server, has a dedicated high bandwidth Internet connection, and employs a network administrator.

Three common software packages for handling email lists are:

- [Listserv](#)
- [Majordomo](#)
- [Lyris](#)

All three offer free versions of their software package, though more advanced features require purchasing a license.

NOTE: NetAction uses and recommends Majordomo list software if your organization has the hardware and technical expertise to operate it. Once the software has been installed and configured the way you want it -- which is the part that requires technical expertise -- anyone with basic computer skills can easily manage the list. Also, the process by which people subscribe or unsubscribe is simple enough that most people don't need help from the list manager.

Techniques for using email lists

If you use a Web-based list service or a commercial list software product, you'll have some decisions to make about how the list will operate. In the following section, we will be reviewing several techniques to set up and use email lists so they serve your organization's needs.

Announcement-only email lists

This configuration provides one-way communication from the list owner to the list subscribers. This configuration is good for distributing electronic newsletters, action alerts, and other information quickly, cheaply and easily to a large number of people. When you configure a list for announcements only, you need a password in order to post messages. Since you determine who knows the password, you determine who can post messages to the list. You can limit posting privileges to one individual, or several people in your organization.

If you set up your own list using the address book and "Bcc" features in your regular email software, you are in effect creating an announcement-only list. That's because you will be the only person with access to the list and the ability to post to it, and your address is the only address that recipients can reply to since the others won't be visible.

The main advantage of an announcement-only list is that the owner has complete control of the content and the frequency of postings. This makes it a good choice if you want to distribute electronic action alerts, press releases, or newsletters. The main disadvantage is that subscribers cannot just hit "reply" to comment to the whole list about something that was posted.

If you're using commercial list software, you can configure the list so that readers can't reply at all, or so that replies go back to the list's owner. One way to be certain that any replies get back to you is to include a "mailto" hyperlink in the text so that readers who want to comment can do so without having to open a message form. A "mailto" hyperlink automatically opens a message form. Double click on the link below to see how it works, then delete the form to return to this lesson.

```
=====
mailto:somebody@yourorganization.org
=====
```

Creating a "mailto" hyperlink is very easy. All you have to do is type: mailto: followed (without any spaces) by the email address you want to link to. For practice, type a "mailto" using your own email address, then click on it to open a message form addressed to yourself. Type "testing" in the subject line, and "hello" in the message field, and send it off. The next time you check your email, you'll find a message from yourself with "testing" as the subject line.

Whether or not you use a "mailto" hyperlink, it is always a good idea to include the email address that readers can write to when you send out an action alert, press release, or other information to an email list.

Moderated email lists

A moderated email list allows for controlled two-way communication. Anyone who subscribes to a moderated list can post a message to the list, but the message is routed to the list owner, who gets to decide whether or not to post it. This gives the list owner nearly as much control over the content as the owner of an announcement-only list.

You can also set up a moderated discussion list by using the address book and "Bcc" features in your regular email software. You set it up exactly as you would an announcement-only list (using the "bcc" field). But when you send something out you include a brief note informing readers that their comments are welcome. Any replies are automatically directed to you since you sent the message. To distribute replies that you approve, simply copy and paste the reply text into a new email form and send out another email to the list you created with your address book and "Bcc" field.

The main advantage of a moderated list is that the moderator can make sure that comments from readers are relevant to the purpose of the list. The main disadvantage is that you'll have to read every reply you get from list subscribers in order to decide whether or not to post them. This can be time-consuming if the list is very active. Also, if you decide not to post someone's comment you may take some heat from the subscriber whose post is rejected. You can minimize such criticism by having a clearly articulated statement describing the purpose of the list.

Unmoderated email lists

An unmoderated list allows for open communication among all subscribers. Anyone who subscribes to an unmoderated list can post a message to the list for everyone else to see. This configuration gives your subscribers the most freedom to communicate. But it also gives you as the list owner the least amount of control over the content.

The main advantage of an unmoderated list is low maintenance for the list owner. If subscription is automatic, rather than by approval, you will be able to manage the list with minimal effort. The main disadvantage, of course, is that you'll have almost no control over the content. This list configuration is the most likely to be abused by subscribers -- and also by spammers -- since there is no way to stop someone from posting anything they want to the list.

You can exercise some control over an unmoderated list by requiring that all subscriptions be approved by the owner. This will allow you to screen out spammers, and also to remove a subscriber who becomes disruptive or impolite. With the exception of spammers, however, you should be cautious about removing subscribers because of concerns about the content of their posts. If the removal of a subscriber is perceived as censorship, it may generate more complaints than it resolves.

Open subscription process (anyone can participate)

An open subscription list allows anyone who is interested to subscribe. You won't have to approve any new subscribers. If you are configuring an "announcement only" list or a "moderated" list, as described above, you may want an open subscription process to avoid having to approve each new subscriber. Since you will control everything that gets posted, you won't have to worry about spammers sending junk email to your list. If you are configuring an "unmoderated" list, and have an open subscription, you are very likely to get spammers subscribing and then spamming the list with junk email.

Membership-only lists (subscription approval, password-protected Web sites)

When you set up a list to require subscription approval, all subscription requests are forwarded to you, or whoever you've designated as the list owner. If you want to allow the subscription, you'll reply to the message with the list password. If you don't want to allow it, you won't need to do anything.

If you set up a list with your own email software, you are in fact setting up a list that requires approval since you're the only one who can add new email addresses to your address book.

How should your organization operate its mailing list? Should it be announcement-only? Is a moderator necessary? What subscription process would be better? Consider your organization's needs and goals before deciding.

Signature files

A signature file (also known as sig or dot-sig file) at the end of an email message is an excellent way to provide contact information. If you include a complete URL, the signature file will also serve as a hyperlink to your Web site. Here is an example of a very basic signature file:

```
=====
<<NetAction>>
Audrie Krause, Executive Director
E-MAIL: audrie@netaction.org
P.O. Box 6739
Santa Barbara, CA 93160
TELEPHONE: (415) 215-9392 FAX: (805) 681-0941
* * * WEB: http://www.netaction.org * * *

*****
=====
```

It's also possible to include a sentence or two in the signature file that promotes an event or action that your organization is involved in. Here is an example of a signature file that contains a message:

```
=====
THE SUITCASE CLINIC
A student-run non-profit organization providing free services
for the homeless and low-income communities.

570 University Hall, Berkeley, CA 94704
(510) 643-6786

website: http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~suitcase/
e-mail: suitcase@socrates.berkeley.edu
=====
```

Most email browsers allow the user to set up a signature file that will automatically be tacked onto the end of every email message. If the signature file is the default, your browser should have a menu choice that lets you send a message without the signature in the event you don't want to include the identifying information. Some browsers also allow the user to set up an alternate signature so that you can include organizational contact information for your activist messages, and personal information for your personal correspondence.

If you plan to use a signature file, you should be aware that many Internet users consider it bad manners if your signature file is larger than your message. So if you frequently send short notes, remember to suppress the signature file.

TRY A PRACTICE ALERT: Get permission from two or three friends to temporarily subscribe their addresses, then create an address book email alert list. Draft a short action alert, and send it to your list.

Part 2C: Tips for Effective Online Media

A NetAction Mini-Trainer

Email is an excellent tool for communicating with media. It is a cost-effective way to quickly distribute press releases and newsletters, and is also useful for submitting letters to the editor or opinion articles. Electronic press releases and newsletters can also be posted to your Web site. NetAction offers the following suggestions for communicating online.

Tips for Effective Online Media:

Distribute email press releases in plain ascii text.

Draft your press release as you would any other email message, using an email software program such as Eudora or Microsoft Outlook. Never send press releases as attachments to email, or attach other documents to email press releases. If you need to prepare a paper copy of the press release, copy and paste the ascii text into a word processing document (such as Microsoft Word) after the release is written in the email browser.

Keep the text brief and focused.

An electronic press release should follow the same "pyramid" format as any other press release. Start with the most important information (and remember the five "W's" - who, what, where, when and why). Use short paragraphs and keep it brief.

Write a subject line that's compelling or provocative.

Keep in mind that the subject line is the first thing reporters will see when they download your release. Never email a press release (or any other message) with a blank subject line.

Include your electronic contact information.

Remember to include your email address and Web site URL in addition to your phone and fax number, and address. Put all your contact information at the top of the press release.

Use hyper-links where appropriate.

If there is additional information available on your Web site -- such as a white paper or an event announcement -- include a hyper-link so reporters can click right to it. Online publications will often include these links in their stories, making this an effective way to direct visitors to your Web site.

Send a test message before distributing your press release.

Always send a copy of the press release to yourself or to a colleague before distributing it. Check the format to make sure there are no broken lines of text, and check for any mistyped Web URLs by testing them to make sure they work.

Avoid disclosing the recipients' email addresses.

Always type the recipients' addresses in the "Bcc" field of your email message header, rather than in the "To" or "Cc" field. (See NetAction's "How to Create An Email Media List.")

Post your organization's media contact information on the home page of your Web site.

Be sure to keep the contact information up-to-date, and include information on how reporters can be added to your mailing list.

Treat email media inquiries the same as phone inquiries.

Always respond just as promptly to email media inquiries as you would to phone calls. Reporters who work for online publications are much more likely to contact you by email than by phone. If you're responsible for answering media inquiries, check your email frequently throughout the day.

Set up an online archive for your media communications.

Set aside an area of your Web site where reporters can locate past press releases. (If you publish a newsletter in electronic form, maintain an online archive of past issues, as well.)

Post press releases only to appropriate lists, news groups, and publications.

If you plan to post your press release to any email discussion lists, news groups or online publications, make sure the topic of your release is appropriate content for the list or Web site. If your press release announces a new report on air pollution, it would not be appropriate content for a forum for race car enthusiasts, for example.

Collect email addresses from your media contacts.

If you've been distributing your press releases by fax or postal mail, ask your media contacts if you can switch to email distribution. Commercial media directors (such as Bacon's Metro California Media) routinely include email contact information. Major newspapers frequently have separate staffs for their online versions, so you'll need to include those contacts on your list, too. There are also media directories and news services specifically for online publications that may be appropriate to add to your media list.

Limit the size of your email message window.

In many email browsers, text that is longer than the width of the message window will "wrap" to the next line. (When text is set to "wrap," you don't need to hit the "return" key at the end of every line.) If the size of your message window is set for more than about 75, the automatic "wrap" may result in broken lines of text.

How to Create An Email Media List

The simplest way to create an email media list is to use your regular email software. The most common products you might use are Qualcomm's Eudora, Microsoft Outlook, or Netscape Mail. To create your own email activism list, you will need to be familiar with two features of your email software: the address book and the "Bcc" field.

Using Your Email Address Book

Most email software programs have a feature that lets you set up an address book where you can store the email addresses of friends, relatives, and business associates. Most email address books will let you store hundreds or even thousands of names, making it a useful tool for creating a simple announcement-only email list that you can use to send out press releases or email newsletters.

For example, if your organization distributes press releases, you can set up an address book entry labeled "Media" to store the email

addresses of reporters and editors so you won't have to send individual messages to each of them. In the example below, we created an address book entry labeled "Media" in Netscape Messenger. The first two email addresses in this "Media" entry are reporter@sfgate.com and editor@latimes.com. (The other addresses aren't visible in the screen shot of the address book, pictured above in part 2b.)

Using the "Bcc" Field

When the email addresses have been entered in the address book, your list is ready to use. But you'll want to send messages to the list without disclosing any of the recipients' addresses. So if you haven't already been introduced to the "Bcc" field, it's time to get acquainted.

When you open a "New Message" window in your email software, the message form will usually include a header that looks something like this:

```
=====
To:
From:
Subject:
Cc:
Bcc:
X-Attachments
=====
```

(Note: In some email software, "Bcc" is not included in the default setting of the header display. If you don't see it, check the "Help" file or the User Manual that came with the software, or contact the software company's support service by phone or email.)

Using the Media list in the example above, here is how you can send a message without revealing the reporters' email addresses: Type "Media" in the "Bcc" field of the message header (instead of in the "To" field) and type your own email address in the "To" field, like this:

```
=====
To: janedoe@nonprofit.org

From: janedoe@caral.org

Subject: PRESS RELEASE: CARAL lauds FDA approval of mifepristone
Cc:
Bcc: Media
X-Attachments
=====
```

Always use the "Bcc" field if you send email to a list you've created in your address book!

If you type "Media" in the "To" field instead of the "Bcc" field, all of the reporters' addresses will be displayed when the recipients open the message. There are two problems with this. First, some people prefer not to disclose their email address. Also, if the address list is long, the header will be long. This is annoying to some people because they have to scroll through screens full of addresses before they see the message. If your list contains several hundred addresses, just imagine how annoying it will be to scroll through all those screens! Here is an example of an email message from someone who neglected to use the "Bcc" field:

```
=====
From: "Jane Doe" <janedoe@hotmail.com>
>
To: James King <JKing@msn.com>
>, Alan Williams <awilliams@sirius.com>,
Dave Garrison <DG@aol.com>, "Jennifer Reilly" <Reilly@Reilly.com>,
"George Kelly" <Gkelly@pacbell.net>, "Thomas Jones" <tj54@aol.com>,
Gina Rogers <GinaR@uswest.com>, Dan Stevens <dans@yahoo.com>,
Vincent Davis <vince@att.net>, Ron Butler <ronbutler@dnai.com>,
"Marc Smith" <marc_smith@earthlink.net>, Tony Altura
<tonya@food.org>, "Jeffrey Carr" <carr867@aol.com>,
"Michael Milton" <mmilton@ucla.edu>,
Peter Boyd <pboyd@mindspring.com>, "Susan Smith" <ss@home.com>
=====
```

Online Media Advocacy Resources

Media Advocacy Guides and Tool Kits

Managing the Media, A Guide for Activists

<http://tenant.net/Organize/media.html>

"Raising Our Voices," A Tool Kit for Activists

<http://www.media-alliance.org/voices/index.html>

ConsumerNet's "How To Work With the Press" Guide

http://www.consumernet.org/library/pr_writing.shtml

ConsumerNet's "Nonprofit Publicity" Guide

<http://www.consumernet.org/library/publicity.shtml>

Benton Foundation's Best Practices Toolkit

<http://www.benton.org/Practice/Toolkit/publicize.html>

NetAction Notes 20 on Media Activism

<http://www.netaction.org/notes/notes20.html>

NetAction Notes 47 on Media Activism

<http://www.netaction.org/notes/notes47.html>

Online Media and News Services

Media Alliance Links to Media Organizations

<http://www.media-alliance.org/medialinks.html>

Thousands of General Media Links

<http://ajr.newslink.org/>

Ascribe Public Interest News Wire

<http://www.ascribe.org/>

Links for Progressives and Media Activists

<http://www.nlightning.com/bookmarks.html>

Salon Magazine

<http://www.salon.com/>

Institute for Global Communication (IGC)

<http://www.igc.org/>

AlterNet

<http://www.alternet.org/>

Common Dreams Newswire

<http://www.commondreams.org/community.htm>

The Village Voice

<http://www.villagevoice.com/>

NewcityNet

<http://www.newcitynet.com/>

Weekly Wire

http://weeklywire.com/ww/current/ww_news.html

NewsBytes News Service

<http://www.newsbytes.com/>

Directories

Mailing List Directory

<http://www.liszt.com/>

Deja News Search locates news groups

<http://www.dejanews.com/>

Publicly accessible mailing lists

<http://www.paml.net/>

Bay Area Progressive Directory & Events Calendar

<http://www.emf.net/~cheetham/index.html>

Craigslist announcement mailing lists for Bay Area events, jobs, etc.

<http://www.craigslist.org/>

Newstrawler searches for news on the Internet

http://www.newstrawler.com/nt/nt_home.html

Online Public Relations

Bibliography

Bacon's Internet Media Directory

1782 pages, \$195.00

Primedia Information Inc.

101 Lake Drive, highstown, NJ 08520-5397

Phone: 800-621-0561

Web: <http://www.baconsinfo.com>

Poor Richard's Internet Marketing and Promotions

By Peter Kent and Tara Calishain

404 pages, \$29.95, ISBN 0-9661032-7-0

Published by Top Floor Publishing

P.O. Box 260072, Lakewood, CO 80226

Web: <http://www.PoorRichard.com/promo>

Public Relations on the Net

By Shel Holtz

332 pages, \$24.95, ISBN 0-8144-7987-1

Published by AMACOM, American Management Association

1601 Broadway, New York, NY 10019

Web: <http://www.amanet.org>

Publicity on the Internet

By Steve O'Keefe

401 pages, \$29.99 ISBN 0-471-16175-6

Published by Wiley Computer Publishing, Wiley & Sons, Inc.
Professional, Reference and Trade Group

605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158-0012

Web: <http://www.wiley.com/compbooks/>

Spin Works!

By Robert Bray

128 pages, \$23.95 ISBN 0-9633687-9-6

Published by the Strategic Press Information Network (SPIN),
a project of the Independent Media Institute

77 Federal Street, San Francisco, CA 94107

Web: <http://www.spinproject.org/>

Part 3A: Web-based Advocacy and Outreach Tools -- Basic Strategies

When it comes to Web sites, "less is more" is often the best strategy. In many cases, your organization will be better off leaving the high-end graphics to the "dot-coms" and focusing on informational content. Although there is much hoopla about DSL and cable broadband, the vast majority of Internet users are still using dial-up Internet service providers. Extensive use of graphics could make your Web site difficult to reach.

The key to building a useful Web site is to identify your organization's core competency and build your Web site around that core so visitors will have fewer things to choose from and fewer choices. Do less, but do it better. The less you do on your Web page, the easier it will be to keep it updated and fresh.

Think about how interactive tools are going to work on the Web site. Will you use a "mailto:" form, a fax server or a CGI script (a small programming application)? How will you manage the communications that will result from your Web presence? Will someone on staff be responsible for answering email? Who will keep the content up-to-date?

You'll need to make a decision about how you will build and maintain your Web site. Will a staff member or volunteer be responsible, or will you hire a consultant? (See our mini-trainer on Web design for more on this topic.)

Avoid Web centrism, the tendency to focus on your Web site and ignore text-only technologies like email, mailing lists and news groups. Text is still far more popular, and has the advantage of being an active "push" technology. Keep in mind that most people check their email first. Bring people to your Web site with targeted, content-rich email announcements and reminders.

Monitor your email box on a regular basis. People will contact you from your Web site and will expect a quick reply. Create standard reply files for easy email management. Compile a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page to reduce the need to respond to common questions. (As people email you with repeat questions, add them to the FAQ.) Periodically revise your Web site so that it addresses the concerns and questions of your audience.

Integration of email and Web tools

An important aspect of conducting successful activism using the Internet is to integrate email and Web tools to create a comprehensive online campaign. Your organization's Web site should be fully operational to conduct the online activism campaign of your choice. In addition, you should use email outreach and publicity through other Web sites to drive traffic to your Web site activism tools.

Work with other Web sites and portals to publicize your online activism campaign. Web sites such as [eActivist](#), [Idealist](#), [HandsNet](#), and [IGC's Internet Progressive Gateway](#) will be supportive of your efforts and will list you free of charge. Surf the Web periodically to find sites likely to assist you in your campaign.

Newsletter sign-up

As we discussed in Part Two, collecting email addresses from your supporters and signing them up to receive your email newsletter is an essential component of your online activism efforts. Your Web site is an important part of this effort. Include your newsletter sign-up form on as many pages of your Web site as possible to make it easy for people to sign up. Keep in mind that some people will find your Web site through search engines and may not even see your Home Page. Make sure that each page has a newsletter sign-up form or a link to the sign-up form.

Publicizing your URL and email list

Think "cross medium" in your effort to publicize your Web site address and any email addresses that are important to your online activism campaign. Your print newsletters, reports, press releases, brochures and business cards should include all of this information. Consider printing up a small flyer or bookmark that you drop into all outgoing mail from your office. We've already mentioned adding this type of information to your email signature files. Add your URL to your voice mail message, particularly on phone numbers used for incoming calls from the general public.

Consider adding a "tell-a-friend" script on your Web site. Visitors can type in the email addresses of friends to email them a brief message recommending that they visit your site. See the American Association of Retired Person (AARP)'s "Tell a Friend!" page at <http://legislators.com/cgi-bin/friend.pl?dir=aarp>.

Whenever possible, make your Web site and email references specific to the content. Saying: "Visit our Web site at www.childrensdefense.org" is good. Saying "Sign the online petition to protect access to child care at www.childrensdefense.org" is even better. Get creative!

If you're using email outreach to announce an upcoming campaign and keep supporters informed as the campaign progresses, include a hyperlink to the campaign page on your Web site. This hyperlink is a vital component of your effort to get people involved quickly and with a minimal time commitment. If your goal is to send 250 faxes to a targeted decision maker, or to collect 5,000 names on a Web site petition, keep your supporters informed, and appeal for their support, with a notice on your Web site. Finally, when an online campaign is complete, report back to your supporters on how you made use of their signature or their faxes. Close the activism loop through this feedback.

Here are some examples to show you how much variety there is in the tools activists are using on Web sites.

Fax server sites:

- [Corporate Watch](http://www.corpwatch.org). Last year they campaigned to "Tell Salomon Smith Barney to Stop Underwriting World Bank Bonds!" Although this service is no longer active, you can see it at <http://www.corpwatch.org/trac/action/2000/18.html>.
- American Civil Liberties Union Fax to Tell Your US Representative and Senator to Support "Driving While Black" Legislation. Visit <http://aclu.org/action/dwb106.html>.
- Global Exchange Fax To Support Democracy in Haiti. Visit: <http://globalexchange.org/getInvolved/haitifax.html>.

Online petitions:

(We discussed the problems with email petitions in [Lesson 2A](#). Web-based petitions are less problematic, so we've included some examples here.)

- The Jane Goodall Institute Petition to End Illegal Hunting of Threatened & Endangered Species (including chimpanzees and other primates) in the Congo Basin in Africa, <http://www.janegoodall.org/chimps/bushmeat.htm>.
- National Center on Institutions and Alternatives Petition to Support the Coalition for Federal Sentencing Reform. Visit: <http://www.sentencing.org/sign.html>.
- International Rivers Network Petition in Support of the Struggle to Stop Dams on India's Narmada River. Visit: <http://www.irn.org/programs/india/petition.000823.html> (No longer active, but a good technique in explaining that the campaign is complete and where to go for further information.)
- SFmusician.com Petition to Save the Local Music Scene. Visit: <http://www.sfmusician.com/petition/>.

Letter sign-ons:

- Planned Parenthood Letter to Support Contraceptive Equity Legislation & Choice. Visit: <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/rchoices/lac/>.
- Center for Food Safety Letter to Take Genetically Engineered Bovine Growth Hormone Off the Market. Visit: http://www.foodsafetynow.org/send.asp?cam_id=57.
- Council for A Livable World Letter to Tell the President to delay a decision on deploying a national missile defense. Visit: http://congress.nw.dc.us/cgi-bin/alertpr_oracle.pl?dir=clw&alert=14

Postcards:

- GEFoodAlert.org ePostcard to Tell Campbell's and Kellogg's to Test and Label Genetically Engineered Foods. Visit: <http://gefoodalert.org/>.
- NARAL's Choice for America Campaign. Visit: <http://www.naral.org/choice/forms/postcards/postcard.html>

Let's think a moment for how your organization could use these Web tools. Which Web tools would be useful for an advocacy campaign supporting a particular bill? How should your organization keep its supporters up-to-date on the campaign's progress and finish?

Web Outreach

Relatively new services on the Web are allowing organizations to find and communicate with other organizations and interested people that may be concerned with similar issues. These outreach services are provided through online forums, web-portals, or other outreach services.

Web Forums

Web Forums are areas on the Web where you can post and respond to messages. It's likely that in the future, many businesses, government offices, schools and non-profit organizations will have forums on their Web sites.

Web forums are similar to "usenet" in that both forums and usenet allow users to post and respond to messages. The difference is that Web forums are based on the Web (rather than a separate Internet system like usenet), and are considerably more flexible than usenet

(especially with respect to customization, security, and advertising). Web forums are also similar to "chat" in that both forums and chat allow users to gather and interact on the web. The main difference is that forums do not require all participants to be online at the same time.

Since conventional search services are not designed to efficiently index forum discussions, [Forum One](#) Communications Corporation has made its Forum One index available to the public at no charge.

Examples of non-profits using open source and shareware tools to create forums:

Example: Environmental Defense Fund <http://plaza.edf.org/discussion.nsf/>

Example: Multicultural Education Discussion Board <http://curry.edschool.virginia.edu/go/multicultural/pavboard/pavboard.html>

An example of a site using Web forums:

[Alternet's message boards](#) provide a number of Web forums on widely varying topics.

Other forms of online forums allow users to connect to discussions about any number of topics related to the site by connecting the user to a newsgroup, allowing them to sign up to listserves, or providing them with chat connections.

- [Charity Channel](#) provides discussion forums on many subjects concerning nonprofits. This service is provided through listserves that you can sign up for.
- [Deja.com's Usenet Discussion Service](#) allows users to search for topics in Usenet newsgroups.
- [Liszt.com](#) is a directory of mailing lists, newsgroups, and IRC chat channels.

Web Portals

Web Portals are services that connect people and organizations to many different networks and Internet resources through one site. They connect any number of organizations around the world through their sites and thus help promote coalitions between organizations that otherwise may have never contacted each other.

Some of these Portals only provide the network links for organizations to utilize. These portals facilitate in the organization and disbursement of information throughout the web.

- [The Institute for Global Communications \(IGC\)](#) is a site that provides links to several networks including Peace Net, Eco-net, Women's Net and the Anti-Racism Net. Each of these in turn provide information and links related to the respective subjects.
- [The Common Dreams Center](#) is another site that provides links to over 120 organizations in the United States.
- [Union of International Associations](#) website has links to over 12,000 NGO's and other organizations indexed by name, region and subject area.

Other portals are more actively involved in helping organizations make connections and link with others of similar goals and interests. These portals provide search mechanisms and other services that allow organizations to actively search out other groups with similar goals.

- Action Without Borders' site www.Idealist.org is one such portal that allows organizations to search a database of over 20,000 international non-profits by subject, dates, or names in order to facilitate in coalition building.
- www.guidestar.org also provides a searchable database of over 640,000 non-profit organizations throughout the United States indexed by name, subject, location and date.

Finding Volunteers

Nonprofit organizations can find volunteers online through web services that match volunteers with organizations. Nonprofits can find volunteers in their area or volunteers who want to work at home. **Virtual volunteering** is work that is done over the internet from a home or work computer. Virtual volunteers give nonprofit groups more freedom in finding help; they are no longer limited to volunteers in the area. See the [Virtual Volunteering Project](#) for more information.

Example: <http://www.servenet.org>

Example: [Points of Light Foundation](#) (List of Volunteer Centers by U.S. State)

Example: <http://www.idealist.org> (Allows prospective volunteers to find you through a search on organizations indexed by subject, date, location, skills, or language)

Also see [Web Sites to Find Volunteer Opportunities](#).

Job Opportunities

In addition to volunteers, nonprofit organizations can also find paid employees on the internet. Many websites help users find jobs with nonprofit groups and let nonprofit organizations list their job opportunities.

- [Idealist.com's Job Search](#) lets users search for Nonprofit jobs by location, category, and description.
- [ACCESS](#) is a nonprofit organization that list jobs, offers career counseling, and has archives of articles concerning nonprofits.
- [OpportunityNOCs.org](#) helps users search for jobs and sign up for their mailing lists about nonprofit jobs.

Web-Based Services for Nonprofits

Many Web companies and organizations offer services, like management or research tools, specifically designed to assist nonprofit organizations.

Management

Many nonprofit organizations are interested in improving efficiency within their organization. There are online services that have information on how to manage organizations.

- [Nonprofit Assessment Tool](#) is a free tool to assess different parts of your organization's management.
- [Free Management Library](#) has links to many different management-related topics.
- [Center for Nonprofit Management](#) educational services, consultation, and information.
- [CompassPoint Nonprofit Services](#) management support services to nonprofits.

Research

The Internet makes it very easy to do research on almost any topic. Instead of spending hours at the library, people can do research from their home computers. Research about nonprofit organizations can be found online.

There are a number of media sites and online portals that allow organizations to access the information they have in their archives and databases. These include both free and paid sites.

Some sites will provide searchable databases of information that they have collected. Most of these sites are free.

- [National Center for Charitable Statistics](#) data on the nonprofit sector in the United States
- [The Literature of the Nonprofit Sector](#) a searchable database of the Foundation Center's libraries
- [Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly](#) articles and papers that report research on voluntarism, philanthropy, and nonprofit organizations
- [The Right to Know Network](#) provides access to databases on industries, housing and environmental factors in the United States. If the server is down or you cannot find what you are looking for, RTK will do the research for you and email you the information they find.

Other sites may offer access to their databases for a fee.

- [www.alternet.org](#) is a news portal site that provides alternative news articles both written by them and collected from a large number of freelance writers and other organizations. They provide a syndication service that gives access to over 9,000 stories in their archives for an annual fee.
- [Lexis-Nexis](#) is one of the largest news and research portals on the web. They provide research memberships for organizations as well as individuals depending upon each's respective research needs.

Additional Resources

There are many other services available on the world wide Web for nonprofit organizations. Many other websites have information about different services for nonprofit groups. Some sites allow users to search for specific services.

- [Idealist's List of Services and Programs](#)
- [The Non-profit Zone](#) is a comprehensive resource base for non-profits that provides many of the resources discussed here for free.
- [INC: The Nonprofit FAQ](#) is a collection of information from many different e-mail lists and Usenet groups.
- [Helping.org's Resources for Nonprofits](#)
- [Yahoo's List of Nonprofit Resources](#)
- [Government Resources for Nonprofits](#)
- [The Internet Prospector](#)

Here are some additional information sources on the World Wide Web.

- [The World Wide Web Consortium](#)
- [WebReference.com](#)
- [Web Developer's Virtual Library](#)
- [Yahoo's World Wide Web links](#)

Part 3B: Web-based Advocacy and Outreach Tools -- Web Site mini-trainer

How to Get Web Space for Your Organization

Before a webpage can be seen by the public, it needs a Web address. Some Internet companies offer a limited amount of **free webspace** and provide users with various tools to begin building their webpages.

Example: <http://www.geocities.com>

Example: <http://www.tripod.com>

Non-profit organizations might also consider buying their own **domain names**. [ICANN](#) has a list of accredited companies that help companies and individuals register domain names. Most of the companies charge a yearly fee to reserve a domain, but may also offer a variety of free services, such as free e-mail, technical support, and website forwarding. Compare a few different services to find the one that best suits your organization. See [How to Find the Perfect Web Hosting Solution](#).

Example: <http://www.yournamefree.com>

Example: <http://www.webhosting.com>

HTML

The main language used on the World Wide Web is HTML. HTML stands for **HyperText Markup Language**.

HTML is used on the Web for three reasons:

- Software independence
- Hardware independence
- Standard formatting

The basics of HTML are relatively simple. The **structure of a Web page** is:

```
<HTML>
<HEAD>
<TITLE> Title of Page </TITLE>
</HEAD>
<BODY>
Put the body of the page here.
</BODY>
</HTML>
```

Most HTML commands use two tags, one at the beginning of the tagged text and another at the end:

```
<TAG>TEXT</TAG>
```

See [HTML 4.0 Elements](#) for a list of all the HTML tags.

Tutorials that teach the basics of HTML are available on the web. See [About.com's list of HTML Tutorials, Tips, and Tricks](#).

Example: [HTML: An Interactive Tutorial for Beginners](#)

Example: [NCSA's Beginner's Guide to HTML](#)

Additional HTML resources:

- [HTML 4.01 Specification](#)
- htmlgoodies.com
- [MediaBuilder](#): free online tools including an image editor, HTML editor, and font mapper.
- [MediaBuilder's List of HTML Editors](#)

For a list of **common mistakes** made on the web, see [Jakob Nielsen's Top Ten Mistakes in Web Design](#).

The HTML code on a website does not all have to be coded by hand. There are programs that will convert documents of non-HTML file types to HTML. See [W3's HTML Converters Page](#) for information and links to different **HTML converters**.

JavaScript

JavaScript is an **optional** object-oriented scripting programming language that can be used to change colors or pictures as your mouse moves over something on your Web page, or for interactive menus, or for other tasks. JavaScripts are short programs that allow users to interact with your Web page. Not all browsers are capable of or enabled to run these scripts. Some people turn off this capability for security reasons because malevolent Internet users have found ways to exploit security holes in browsers with JavaScript. The security risk, however, is usually minimal. **Do not create a web page with navigation based entirely on JavaScript.**

- [IDM: JavaScript FAQ](#)
- [The Definitive JavaScript Resource](#)
- [JavaScript Code Examples](#)
- [Netscape's JavaScript Documentation](#)

Web Content and Accessibility

Focusing on content is the easiest way to make a site compelling and accessible to the widest range of users. There are a couple of things to consider in assuring the accessibility of your page to people with varying technology and needs. These are **interoperability**,

internationalization, and accessibility to disabled persons.

- **Interoperability** merely refers to the need to make the site compatible with different Web browsers and technology. Consider how different **web browsers** will view your page.

- View your page(s) with different browsers, and even different versions of the same browser, such as Netscape Navigator, Microsoft's Internet Explorer, and AOL's older browser. For more info, see the [Best Viewed With Any Browser Campaign](#).

Example:

Web Page Backward Compatibility Viewer <http://www.delorie.com/web/wpbcv.html>

- Validation of your page is very important to ensure that any mistakes that might be overlooked in one version of a browser will be caught. For more information, read [Why Validate Your HTML](#).

Example:

Web Page Validator <http://www.htmlhelp.com/tools/validator/>

- One method of achieving interoperability is by making **multiple pages** formatted for each browser, which can be very time and labor intensive.
- An easier method is to **limit the use of frames and high-end multimedia**, as they're not widely adopted yet. Using fancy, advanced features of web-sites, such as large graphical images, photos, frames, Shock-wave animations, or Java applets, will reduce the number of users who can view your website, and will cause long download times even for those who can view it.

Examples:

- Earth Vision: <http://www.earthvision.net/> (lots of graphics, takes a while to load)
- The Role Model Project for Girls Bookstore <http://www.womenswork.org/girls/books/> (gives choice of frames or not)
- Paragraph175.org <http://www.paragraph175.org/frames.html> (example of page using frames)

- Create good **"ALT" tags** on your Web site for visitors with images turned off or text-only browsers, or create "text-only" Web pages.

Example: Good Alt Tags at Corporate Watch <http://www.corpwatch.org/>

- If you can, **survey your membership** and watch your logs to understand their technological "level" so you can adapt the technology on your Web site to fit their needs, interests and abilities.
- **Internationalization** deals primarily with the incorporation of certain standards within the HTML encoding, but is important for translatability of Web sites to different languages. While this can get fairly complicated, there are a few things that you can do for starters. For more in depth reading on this check out:

RFC2070 ("Internationalization of the HyperText Markup Language", F. Yergeau, G. Nicol, G. Adams, and M. Drst, January 1997). <http://www.ietf.org/rfc/rfc2070.txt>

Weaving the Multilingual Web, 15th international Unicode Conference, Aug 31st <http://www.w3.org/Talks/1999/0830-tutorial-unicode-mjd/>

- Mark up the **primary language** of the site. To do this you just insert a Lang attribute into the HTML tag at the beginning of your page. Language tagging helps control classification, searching and sorting by search engines, control hyphenation, quotation marks and spacing and allows for accurate voice synthesis by non-visual browsers.

Example: <HTML LANG="en-US">

- Specify any changes in the language for a particular part of your document. This is also important to disabled accessibility as discussed later. To do this you just insert the Lang attribute into the part of the document which changes languages.

Example

<P Lang="ja">

For a full list of language codes see:

<http://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/bibcodes.html>

- There are online tools that can be used to translate the text of your site to other languages if you want. Some of these are paid services, others are provided free of charge. The free ones are mechanical translations and not entirely how we'd say thing if we were actually speaking the second language, so take them with a grain of salt.

Examples:

Weblations' Description of Translation services: http://www.weblations.com/eng/articles/art_1.htm

AltaVista World's Translation services: <http://world.altavista.com/>

- **Accessibility** requires that people with varying physical disabilities can utilize a site. This includes making the page compatible with Braille readers, non-visual browsers, and other forms of **non-graphical or visual technology**. The W3C's paper on

accessibility outlines "checkpoints" that can be used to make a site accessible to disabled people. These include:

- Providing **textual descriptions** of all non-textual content either within the alt tags of the images or separate, redundant textual descriptions. This includes tables that do not convert easily to linear text format.
- Use **style sheets** to define the format of a document for easier use by text or non-visual browsers. These are called Cascading Style Sheets (CSS) and are described in more detail at : <http://www.htmlhelp.com/reference/css/>
- Being aware of the **colors** used in the page, as high contrast is needed for some with color or seeing disorders. Don't use color alone to relay information.
- Clearly identify any changes in the **language** of the page, as some non-visual readers can shift languages if they are instructed to. See previous Internationalization bullet on how to do this.
- Provide linear **text alternatives** to any tables that are necessary. Text only and non-visual browsers have a hard time rendering side by side text in tables.
- Avoid Screen Flickering, Text Blinking, Scrolling, Auto Refreshing or other movement on the page unless you include a method to disable it in a script or applet. **Some people with photosensitive disorders may have seizures from screen flickering at rates between 4 and 59 flashes per second!!!**
- Provide **clear and consistent navigation**, with site maps, search abilities, navigation bars, content listings, and clear labels to all links.

A much more complete description of disabled accessibility can be obtained at W3C's technical accessibility guidelines at: <http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT/>

An easier to follow, slide show based curriculum of the Web accessibility guidelines proposed by the W3C is available at: <http://www.w3.org/WAI/wcag-curric/>

Michael Stein wrote a great article called [Focus on Content](#) (reprinted with permission) that provides a brief methodology for creating content driven sites.

Web Promotion

Web site promotion and maintenance should be considered as you begin to design your site. In this section, we identify some of the things you need to consider.

- Design an outreach plan
 - what is your URL going to be?
 - find volunteers to help
 - what is your staffing commitment?
- Get listed with all search engines
 - Search Engine Comparisons
 - [The search-engine secrets of the pros](#) (ZDNet)
 - [How to Search the Web: A Guide To Search Tools](#)
 - [Introduction to Search Engines](#)
 - Major Engines
 - Alta Vista <http://altavista.com/>
 - Excite <http://www.excite.com/>
 - HotBot <http://www.hotbot.com/>
 - Infoseek <http://www.infoseek.com/>
 - Lycos <http://www.lycos.com/>
 - WebCrawler <http://www.webcrawler.com/>
 - Yahoo <http://www.yahoo.com/>
 - Search Agregators (may cost money)
 - Submit-it <http://www.submit-it.com/>
 - Yahoo's list on how to promote your Web site http://dir.yahoo.com/Computers_and_Internet/Internet/World_Wide_Web/Site_Announcement_and_Promotion/
 - Yahoo's list of companies that will do it for you http://dir.yahoo.com/Business_and_Economy/Business_to_Business/Marketing_and_Advertising/Internet/Promotion/
 - Postmaster <http://www.netcreations.com/postmaster/>

Michael Stein presented an excellent outline called [Success on the Internet: Creating An Effective Online Presence](#) at a conference in June, 1999 (reprinted with permission).

Additional Tips

Other Web Tools

Password protected Web sites let you limit access to an entire site, or to portions of a site. This configuration can be useful for

membership organizations that wish to provide dues-paying members with services or information not available to the general public. It can also be a useful way for an organization's leadership (Board of Directors, steering committee, etc.) to exchange information or discuss strategy.

Set up a page on your site with links to other Web pages relevant to your message. Whenever you provide a link to another site, contact that site's webmaster and ask for a reciprocal link back to your site. Reciprocal links can help drive traffic to your site from other sites, as well as enrich the content that you offer readers since you are pointing them to other relevant information. But keep in mind that these links can also drive traffic away from your site. That is why it's important to ensure that the links are relevant to your message, and to ask for a reciprocal link back to your site.

Set up a good META Tag for Web crawlers

Key words, page descriptions, expiration dates and other information about your page and site can be "tagged" with html code in the header lines so that they can be located by search engines such as Alta Vista or Infoseek. This will increase the chance of your site being located in a search. See the example below for more information on how to use Meta tags.

Examples: Web Design Group's FAQ (question 26) <http://htmlhelp.com/faq/wdgfaq.htm#26>

Examples: HTML Meta Tag <http://www.w3.org/TR/REC-html40/struct/global.html#h-7.4.4> (Note: this one best used by those familiar with HTML)

Do pro-active promotion to mailing lists and newsgroups

Example: NetAction Notes #32 <http://www.netaction.org/notes/notes32.html>

Example: Jakob Nielsen's Alert Box [alert-box.txt](http://www.useit.com/alertbox/)

Enhance staff/board signature files to provide a friendly reminder for your correspondents

Examples: [a few email signature \(.sig, pronounced dot-sig\) samples](#)

Create campaign icons for linking with other sites.

Icons can be very effective in advocacy campaigns, and they may also help drive traffic to your site. The best icons are simple, small, and easily associated with the issue. They can also be integrated with other aspects of your advocacy. For example, the same graphic can be used on bumper stickers or buttons.

Examples: Any Browser Campaign <http://www.anybrowser.org/campaign/>

Examples: NetAction's Fish Campaign <http://www.netaction.org/msoft/winfish.html>

Be careful about the use of graphics.

Graphics can be used to enhance your webpage. However, the overuse of graphics will slow down your website and may distract users from the information on your website. Sites with low graphics are going to be more accessible than sites with high graphics or advanced features like video streaming. See [NetAction Notes No. 33](#) for a discussion of the use of graphics on the web. Organizations can create their own graphics or use graphics from websites that offer free graphics for use on other webpages. Webcom's [Index of Icons and Graphics](#) has a list of these sites.

Regularly review your Web site statistics to analyze how your site is doing. Obtain statistics not just on your main page, but for other main "section" pages as well.

Examples: NetAction Sample Log <http://www.netaction.org/training/sample-log.html>

As you see in reviewing the sample log from NetAction's Web site, there is a lot of information that can be collected and analyzed. The Internet Service Provider who hosts your Web site may have a uniform way of reporting the statistics on your site, in which case you will have less flexibility about what information you can obtain and analyze.

Monitoring your Web site statistics is useful for a number of reasons. First, it can help you gauge the effectiveness of your Internet outreach. If the statistics tell you that only 150 people have visited your Web site in the last six months, you will probably want to consider other strategies, or possibly reconsider whether maintaining a Web site is the best use of your organization's resources. You can also use the statistics to determine which aspects of your site are attracting interest, and which are not. This could be useful when you consider a redesign of your site, or the addition or deletion of specific information.

Non-profit organizations may also find the Web site statistics helpful in convincing potential funders that your efforts are worthy of their support. For example, you can document the number of signatures on an electronic petition, or the number of faxes sent to a member of Congress from your site's fax server.

Part 4: Membership and Fundraising

The Internet provides activist organizations with new ways of communicating with members, recruiting new members, and soliciting

contributions. With some exceptions, Internet membership building and fundraising activities will mostly have an incremental effect in the short run, and it is too early to predict what will occur in the long run. Organizations that start now to integrate an online presence into existing activities will be in the best position to capitalize on the technology as it evolves.

Your Membership

- Craft your online presence for your existing membership

Know your organization's mission and understand your members before trying to identify online strategies that enhance your organization's work. Do your members need to know the latest information about AIDS treatment? A daily email newsletter that summarizes developments in AIDS treatment and provides pointers to more detailed reports on the Web might be a useful supplement to your other communications. Does your organization offer a support group for parents of children with diabetes? An email discussion list could supplement the group's weekly meeting.

- Publicise your online efforts across the mediums at your disposal:
 - Newsletter
 - Events
 - Voice mail
 - Phone
 - Add email addresses and Web URLs to business cards, bumper stickers, buttons, and other give-away items
- Train your staff, board and volunteers to understand how your online presence works, and how to explain it and promote it to members.
- Get as much feedback from your members as possible about your Internet presence. You are doing this for them, so let your efforts reflect their needs.
- Avoid Web-centrism, particularly with members.
- Don't just repackage your brochure or newsletters since your members already receive that. Look for ways to deliver new content or new methods of interaction that are not available through other mediums.
- The Internet is a "fast" medium -- can it play a role for "urgent action alerts" for your members?

Keeping Track

A free tool is available on the Web for non-profit organizations that need a membership database to track contributions and donor demographics. The tool is ebase, a database template that any nonprofit organization can adopt to its needs. In addition to its database functions, ebase can be used to print envelopes and mailing labels and generate customized merge letters, including personalized email messages to subsets of the organization's membership list. Manuals and online help are also available. The database was developed by Desktop Assistance with support from several foundations.

Copies can be downloaded from the Web at: <http://www.ebase.org/>

Fundraising

Many organizations are experimenting with cyberspace fundraising. Email solicitations are increasingly popular, especially as year-end appeals. And despite early concerns, these solicitations are not generating widespread complaints about spam. The key is to limit your online soliciting to those individuals who have already expressed an interest in your work, by becoming a member, joining a list service, or participating in an action or event that your organization sponsored.

Many organizations have set up membership forms on their Web sites. These efforts range from "bare bones" efforts that provide a postal address and encourage readers to send in a check, or sophisticated secure servers that enable the donor to use a credit card.

Some groups raise money by online sales of buttons, bumper stickers, T-shirts, publications, or other items. Others offer donors a technology-oriented gift. Examples range from simple items such as mouse pads, to fairly sophisticated screen saver software that the donor can download in exchange for a contribution. Some of the issue-oriented organizations have set up links with Amazon.com, which donations a portion of the book sales to the organizations promoting the books. However, some groups now have concerns about Amazon.com's privacy policy. For more information, please visit the Electronic Information Privacy Center (EPIC)'s [press release](#) on the matter.

General fundraising articles

Example: Using the Internet for Fundraising <http://www.nonprofit-info.org/misc/981027em.html>

Example: Taking the plunge into e-mail fundraising <http://www.netaction.org/training/funding.html>

Example: Fundraising Online <http://www.fundraisingonline.com/index.html>

Three different examples of fundraising approaches:

Example: EPIC <http://www.epic.org/epic/support.html>

Example: CARAL <http://www.caral.org/form.membership.html>

Example: WomensWork's secure server <https://secure.manymedia.com/womenswork/form.html>

Security should not be taken lightly on the net, especially when you are trusted with other people's financial information. It is not wise at this time to send your credit card information over the net without using some kind of secure methodology, be it encryption via PGP

and/or use of a secure server. Many non-profit organizations house their Web sites on external site hosting providers, while others are in full control of all resources related to their Internet connectivity. Similarly, you may have the capability of implementing electronic commerce software on your server or through your host service provider to offer the security needed for credit card transactions. Alternatively, you may choose an intermediate service such as a trusted third party (such as First Virtual), funds transfer (such as CyberCash), digital cash (as it is), or an outside credit card processing firm to handle your transactions.

Financial resources on the Web

There are many different ways that organizations can **fundraise on the Internet**. Read [How Can We Use the Internet for Fundraising?](#) and Netaction Notes [Click and give online](#) and [Profiting from non-profits](#) for starters.

Some websites match people who want to donate money with charities that are trying to raise money. Nonprofit organizations can register with these sites to find potential donors.

example: <http://www.helping.org>

example: <http://www.egrants.org>

[Fundsnet Services](#) is a grants and fundraising portal.

There are also sites that will do the soliciting of donors for the organizations that are registered with it.

Example: www.charitableway.com solicits donors based on profiles of the organizations that register with them. They take 10% of the donations.

Other sites allow a certain portion of their profits to be donated to non-profit organizations.

Example: www.4charity.com provides an online "Charity Mall" where 5-40% of sales go to the non-profits signed up.

For further information on non-profits and e-commerce, read this article from www.Benton.org

Financial transactions on the Web can be handled in a couple of different ways.

[CyberCash](#) is a secure payment technology that facilitates financial transactions between banks, financial institutions, transaction processors, merchants, and consumers. Consumers must first establish an account with CyberCash. Once they have done so, they can make purchases from participating merchants, and CyberCash collects a fee for processing the transaction.

Credit card processing firms, such as creditnet.com, facilitate financial transactions by providing a secure server through which the transaction is processed. This prevents the consumer's financial information from being read by any of the computers it goes through as the data travels from the customer's computer to the credit card company.

A third alternative is to encrypt, or code, the data so that it cannot be read as it travels over the Internet. Here is some [background on PGP, one popular encryption technology](#).

More resources:

- GuideStar donor's guide to nonprofits and charities: <http://www.guidestar.org/>
- Philanthropy Journal's Meta-Index of Nonprofits: http://www.pj.org/links_metaindex.cfm
- PhilanthropySearch search engines for nonprofits and philanthropy: <http://www.philanthropysearch.com/>
- Council on Foundations: <http://www.cof.org/>
- Foundation Center: <http://www.fdncenter.org/>
- Forum of Regional Association of Grantmakers: <http://www.rag.org/>
- Free Database for Managing Donor, Member, and Supporter Information: <http://www.ebase.org/>
- Electronic Commerce FAQ: <http://cism.bus.utexas.edu/resources/ecfaq.html>

Part 5: Privacy, Copyright, and Censorship

Privacy

Mailing list privacy issues

All mailing lists (also known as listserves) are managed via email - a form of communication that is inherently insecure. Sending mail via the Internet is like sending a postcard through the post office - given the time and resources, anyone who wants to read your mail can do so. So the tips below will not completely ensure secure and private mailing lists.

One way that you can circumvent some security issues is by using Web-based commercial list services like those discussed in [Part 2B](#). These services often provide all the capabilities of commercial mailing list software - mass emailing, easy subscription and unsubscribe procedures - with easier management, better security, and extra options like archival abilities. As noted in [Part 2B](#), however, while these services are usually free there are some drawbacks. The companies that provide them attach short advertisements to the top or bottom of all mailings, and most include terms of use that give the service ownership of the content of your lists. You can find a listing of "community groups" at http://dir.yahoo.com/Computers_and_Internet/Internet/Chats_and_Forum/Mailing_Lists/.

Tips for operating your organization's list:

- Encourage people to use "disposable" email addresses when signing up for your mailing list. (See "Tips for Mailing List Members," #1, below, for information on "disposable" email addresses.) While this policy is impossible to strictly enforce, you can promote it by suggesting it on the mailing list sign-up page of your Web site and other written material that includes information about signing up for your organization's list.
- Hide the list membership when you configure the list. Unless the list administrator explicitly disables the ability for outsiders to view the list membership, anyone on the Internet can view the entire membership of a mailing list with a simple e-mail command.
- If your list is used for announcement purposes rather than open discussion among members, you'll want to configure your list to restrict posting privileges. Allow only staff members or trusted volunteers to post to the list, rather than allowing all subscribers to post. This will help prevent spammers or email harassers from attacking your members.
- If your list is used for open discussion among members, you'll want to configure your list to be moderated (see [Part 2B](#).) Designate a staff member or trusted volunteer to serve as moderator and approve every post before it is sent. This will help prevent spammers or e-mail harassers from attacking your members.

Tips for mailing list members:

- Use a "disposable" e-mail address when signing up for mailing lists. "Disposable" e-mail addresses minimize the risk in the event an unauthorized person gains access to the list membership.

A good "disposable" e-mail address has two characteristics: strangers cannot easily gain information about the sender merely by looking at the address, and the "disposable" address is separate from a personal or work e-mail address. The e-mail address "audrie@netaction.org," for example, would not make a good "disposable" address, because strangers can easily decipher that the address belongs to someone at NetAction whose first name is Audrie.

Good places to obtain "disposable" e-mail addresses are websites that offer free webmail, such as Yahoo! or Hotmail. You can find a listing of free e-mail sources at [Yahoo's listing of free e-mail sources](#).

- Consider using a "screen name," rather than your real name or a combination of your initials and name, when subscribing to mailing lists or posting to newsgroups.

World Wide Web privacy issues

The Internet allows users separated by thousands of miles to communicate instantaneously, and the physical distance between users can lead to a false sense of security. In reality, the World Wide Web is highly insecure. If you want to see exactly how much information can be obtained about you and your computer when you visit a Web site, take the test at <http://www.privacy.net/analyze/>.

Cookies

Internet "cookies" are text files that Web sites place on the hard drive of your computer when you visit the site. Some people don't like having their online movements tracked, and view cookies as a threat to their privacy. Other people aren't troubled by cookies. Whether or not you like having your movements tracked on the Internet, cookies were created for legitimate business purposes. Online shopping sites, for example, use cookies to "remember" which items you have placed in your "shopping cart."

How dangerous are cookies? Cookies are simple text files, so they cannot transmit viruses or cause any other damage to your computer's hard drive or to your data. But there are good reasons to be concerned about your privacy. Both Netscape Communicator and Internet Explorer, the two most popular Web browsers, contain several potential major security holes related to cookies. For example, one privacy monitoring Web site (<http://privacy.net/>) discovered a bug in both Netscape and Internet Explorer that allows any Web site to download all cookies on a user's computer. Though the bug occurs in only one out of thousand computers, it allows Web sites to obtain e-mail addresses, passwords, and other sensitive information from affected browsers. (For more information on this bug, see <http://privacy.net/cookiebug/>.)

Tips for using cookies:

- Give your Web browser a free upgrade to the latest version, which should include a patch that fixes cookie-related security bugs like the one described above. You can update Netscape at <http://home.netscape.com/> and Internet Explorer at <http://www.microsoft.com/ie/>.
- If you want to know how often Web sites place cookies on your computer, set your Web browser's preferences to alert you when sites are about to place cookies on your computer, and then visit some of your favorite Web sites. Most browsers have three options for cookie notification:
 - You may choose to have your browser accept all cookies without first informing you.
 - You may have your browser ask you whether a cookie should be accepted every time a Web site tries to place one on your computer.
 - You may refuse all cookies.

In Netscape, you will find these options under Edit --> Preferences --> Advanced. In Internet Explorer, go to Tools --> Internet Options --> Security", click on the button that says Custom Level and scroll down to the section entitled Cookies.

Since many cookies are harmless, and popular websites such as Hotmail and Amazon.com utilize them in many transactions, you may not want to deny all cookies. The second option - asking your browser to inform you when a website presents you with a cookie - affords you the option to deny a cookie from websites that you may not trust.

Cookie information links

- [Cookie Central](#) - A nicely designed site that tells you everything you ever wanted to know about cookies, good and bad. Includes bug alerts, ways to disable cookies, and the friendly uses of cookies.
- [Junkbuster's How Web Servers' Cookies Threaten Your Privacy](#) - Clear-cut guide on why cookies are bad, and how you can disable cookies.
- [EPIC's Cookies Page](#) - Links to articles on problems with cookies, as well as the Internet Engineering Task Force's proposal to fix many of the problems with cookies.

Secure Sockets Layer (SSL)

SSL is an Internet standard that provides for the safe transfer of personal information, such as a credit card number, over the Internet. It does this through encryption, a process that scrambles the information you type on a Web page into a code that can only be read by someone with the specific key to unlock that code. When directed to a Web page using SSL, your browser will automatically encrypt all information that you submit to the Web site. Any time you are asked to provide sensitive personal information on a Web site - such as your credit card numbers or home address - you should use a secure Web site, as explained below.

Tips for conducting safe online transactions using SSL:

- Your Web browser will automatically encrypt information for you, using its highest level of built-in protection. Older browsers, however, may not utilize 128-bit encryption, the highest level of protection currently available. You can upgrade your browser to use 128-bit encryption for free, by visiting <http://home.netscape.com/> for Netscape, or <http://www.microsoft.com/ie/> for Internet Explorer.
- Always ensure that your connection uses SSL before conducting business on the Internet. Look at the bottom left corner of your Web browser. If the Web site uses SSL, you will see a closed lock icon in Netscape, or a key icon in Internet Explorer. Also look at the Web address (URL) locator bar in your browser. Transactions using SSL will have addresses that begin with https:// instead of the standard insecure http://.
- **Always** print a hard copy of online transactions after you fill out the Web page form - and do it before you hit the "Send" or "Submit" button. Keep a printed record of the company's contact information, including the email address, phone number, and URL, in a safe place.

Web site privacy policies

Any Web site that asks you for information should explain its privacy policy and tell you up front what it intends to do with that information. A good privacy policy will tell you exactly what information the Web site collects from visitors, as well as how that information will be used. For example, if the Web site includes a mailing list sign-up form, the policy should disclose whether your address will be shared with other Web site operators without your permission.

Examples of robust privacy policies include:

- [American Civil Liberties Union \(ACLU\)](#)
- [Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility \(CPSR\)](#)
- [People for the American Way \(PFAW\)](#)

Spam

When not referring to the canned pinkish meat, "spam" refers to the mass mailing of unsolicited e-mail. ("Spam" also refers to the unsolicited or junk e-mail itself.) Like traditional junk mail sent through the post office, spam is annoying and wasteful, and at times deceitful or offensive. Examples of spam include e-mail advertisements for consumer products, pornographic material, and get-rich-quick scams. Internet hoaxes, the virtual equivalent of urban legends, are another form of spam, as is unsolicited political e-mail.

Spam is wasteful for several reasons. E-mail users across the world waste time downloading, reading, and deleting unwanted e-mail. Furthermore, spammers (the people who send spam) usually target large groups of e-mail users, adding significant stress to mail servers, the computers operated by Internet service providers to send and deliver their customers' e-mail. In the worst cases, spam can completely overwhelm a mail server, causing it to shut down and preventing the ISP's customers from sending or receiving any e-mail.

Sometimes it can be hard to determine whether a particular email message is spam or is useful, wanted information posted to a mailing list for outreach purposes. If you manage a mailing list for your organization or your own personal activism, use the tips below to make sure that you don't alienate your subscribers by sending them spam.

How to avoid becoming a spammer

- Don't send out unsolicited mass e-mailings, or subscribe people to mailing lists without their permission.
- Never post action alerts to email discussion lists or news groups on unrelated issues. If your action alert is about clean air, you're likely to get flamed if you send it to a discussion list focused on free speech.
- If you want to create your own mailing list, start by sending a message to appropriate discussion lists and newsgroups, announcing the new list and inviting people to subscribe. "Appropriate" means the topic of the discussion list or news group is related to the issue you address in your message. Be as specific as possible about the topic and how the list will operate. Will it be an unmoderated discussion list, or a moderated announcement list? Will there be several postings daily, or one posting every few weeks?
- As explained in [Part 2B](#), avoid using the "To" and "Cc" fields when sending messages. Put your own e-mail address in the "To:" field and use the "Bcc" field for all the other addresses.

How to fight spam that you receive in your mailbox

- When you receive spam, do NOT reply to the sender and ask to be taken off of the list - even if the mailing instructs you to do so. Often spammers will take the e-mail address of the people who reply to spam mailings and add them to other spam lists.
- Use a "disposable" e-mail address when registering with websites. (See the [section on mailing list privacy issues](#) for more information on "disposable" e-mail addresses.)

Further steps to combating spam include reporting spammers to their ISPs, who will often take action against them by shutting down their accounts. Visit the [Network Abuse Clearinghouse](#) for more information on how to report spammers.

Links to more information about spam

- [Boycott Internet Spam!](#) - A thorough introduction to spam, why it's bad and ways to combat it.
- [EFF's Spamming, Cybersquatting, Net Abuse, and Online Responsibility Archive](#) - Press releases, letters to Congress, and articles by the Electronic Frontier Foundation, an advocacy group dealing with Internet and technology issues.
- [EPIC's Spam Page](#) - Includes information on anti-spam bills under consideration in Congress, in addition to links to articles on spam.
- [Junk Email Resource](#) - The resource center for information on the fight against spam. Includes links to spam-related lawsuits, a step-by-step form to report fraud conducted through spam, and other resources.
- [SpamCop](#) - After you register with SpamCop, you can copy and paste your spam e-mails into a text box and SpamCop will automatically report the offender to his or her ISP.

Copyrighted Material on the World Wide Web

Copyright laws apply to material published on the World Wide Web just as with books, articles, CDs, and videos. But many Web pages lack explicit copyright notices that inform visitors of what may or may not be downloaded or posted elsewhere, for public or private use.

When creating a Web site containing original material, it's a good idea to post a copyright policy in an easily noticeable spot. An example of an extensive copyright policy can be found at <http://www.mlanet.org/copyright.html>.

The "Digital Millennium Copyright Act" was enacted in October 1998 specifically to address Internet copyright issues. For more information on the DMCA, please visit the Association of Research Libraries' analysis of the bill at <http://www.arl.org/info/frn/copy/dmca.html>.

What Web material is copyrighted?

Unless explicitly stated otherwise, all original content on a Web site is copyrighted to the creator or owner of that Web site. If you would like to use content, text, or graphics from someone else's website, both common courtesy and the law dictate that you must first obtain that author's permission.

Web page addresses are merely links and cannot be copyrighted. However, a collection of links that an author compiled may be copyrightable, since it would be the author's original collection.

Because of the nature of the Web, it is not always easy to determine exactly what content on a Web site is subject to copyright laws. For some practical tips for dealing with copyrights on the Web, visit The Copyright Website: The WWW, at <http://www.benedict.com/digital/www/webiss.htm>.

For more information on copyrights and the World Wide Web, see the following sites:

- [Intellectual Property on the Web](#) - This site addresses several problematic questions having to do with copyrighted material on the Internet.
- [Copyright and the World Wide Web](#) - The Information Architecture division of the Los Alamos National Laboratory has written this short article on copyrights and the World Wide Web.

Censorship

Censorship is a complicated issue that divides some progressive groups that generally agree on other issues. Free speech advocates like the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Electronic Privacy Information Center (EPIC) have opposed any limitations on Internet speech, but other organizations worry that acts of violence may be promoted if there are no restrictions at all on hate speech. Planned Parenthood, for example, won a \$109 million judgment against the authors of the "Nuremberg Files" Web site, arguing that the site incited visitors to conduct acts of violence against individual abortion providers. (See [Planned Parenthood's press release](#) and [an alternative view on free speech](#).)

Filtering software

The proliferation of pornography, hate speech, and other offensive content, as well as the potential threat of Internet predators, raises concerns among parents about what their children view online. Some parents use filtering software such as [NetNanny](#) and [CyberSitter](#) to block access to Web sites they consider inappropriate for their children, or simply offensive.

But filtering software can also inadvertently block useful Web sites. Most filtering software look for "keywords" when blocking specific Web pages. Yet Web sites that support breast cancer research, for example, may be blocked because they contain the word "breast."

For more information on the capabilities of filtering software and reviews of the most popular brands, visit PC Magazine's [1998 Utility Guide: Parental Filtering Utilities](#). For more information on the problems with filtering software, visit [Peacefire](#).

Free speech resources

- [Peacefire.org](#)
- [Center for Democracy and Technology: Free Speech Online](#) - A thorough, well-defined Web site on all things related to Internet censorship, including original publications, news on legislation and court cases, and resources for parents.
- [EFF's Censorship & Free Expression Archive](#) - A long list of articles, files, and links documenting Internet censorship.
- [Free Expression Network: Internet Issues](#) - The Free Expression Network is a coalition of free speech groups, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, People for the American Way, and EPIC. This site contains current news on Internet censorship issues.

The Virtual Activist Reader

Section I: General Resources for Activists

- [About.com's section on nonprofits and charitable organizations](#)
- [Idealist's links to staff and management resources, employment and internships](#)
- [Common Dreams Newswire progressive nonprofit information portal](#)
- [International Organizations' Web page](#)
- [WebActive Directory](#), annotated list of 1,000+ charities, run by RealNetworks
- [Compass Point Nonprofit Services](#) (formerly the Support Center/Nonprofit Development Center)
- [National Alliance for Nonprofit Management](#) (formerly the Support Centers of America)
- [NetAction's Virtual Activist Training Guide](#)
- [Getting Started on the Internet](#) (from idealist.org, Action Without Borders)
- [ITrain's collection of Internet training materials](#)
- [Online Resources for Non-profit Organizations](#)
- [California Public Libraries with Internet Access](#)
- [IGC's Product Center](#)
- [ONE/Northwest's Activist Toolkit](#)
- [The Management Center](#)
- [Benton Foundation's Best Practices Toolkit](#)
- [ILC Glossary of Internet Terms](#)
- [Comprehensive Information on Politics, Activism, and Elections](#)
- [Nonprofit GENIE](#)
- [Nonprofit Consultants ONTAP](#)
- [Mailing List Directory](#) (locates email lists)
- [Directory of Publicly Accessible Mailing Lists \(PAML\)](#)
- [Deja News Search](#) (locates newsgroups)
- [San Francisco Bay Area Progressive Directory](#)
- [The Bay Guardian Action Network](#)
- [Craig's List](#) (events, jobs, items of local community interest)
- [MediaChannel](#)

Section II: Additional Resources on Web Page Development

- [Web Interface to Whois](#)
- [HTML Editors](#)
- [About.com's HTML guide](#)
- [All About the Web](#) (W3 Consortium)

- [Use the META Tag](#)

Section III: Articles on Internet Activism

- [Phil Agre on Internet petitions](#)
- [Nonprofit and Watchdog Groups Work the Net](#) (You will be prompted for login/password to NY Times's site. Free subscription.)
- [The Online Activist](#)

Section IV: Additional Resources for Online Activism

- [LINC Project welfare rights organizers toolkit](#)
- [Free Speech Internet Television](#)
- [IGC's Progressive Gateway](#)
- [Organizers' Collaborative](#)

Section V: Non-Profit Technology Planning and Assistance

- [LINC Project presentation](#) for low-income organizations on developing a technology strategy
- [CompuMentor's Nonprofit Resource Center](#)
- Arts Wire ["Spider School" Training on Technology Planning](#)
- [Nonprofit Use of the Internet](#)
- [Project Connect](#) and select the "Project Connect"

Section VI: Fundraising Resources

- [Share Our Strength's revenue generating opportunities and resource database for nonprofits](#)
- [Community Wealth Resources](#)
- [GuideStar donor's guide to nonprofits and charities](#)
- [PhilanthropySearch search engines for nonprofits and philanthropy](#)
- [Council on Foundations](#)
- [Foundation Center](#)
- [Forum of Regional Association of Grantmakers](#)
- [eBase: Free Database for Managing Donor, Member, and Supporter Information](#)

Section VII: NetAction Notes Articles on Internet Activism

- No. 8: [Notes from the Virtual Activist Workshop](#)
- No. 9: [Resources for Virtual Activists](#)
- No. 11: [More Resources for Virtual Activists](#)
- No. 14: [Act Locally, Organize Globally](#)
- No. 14: [Is It Outreach or Is It Spam?](#)
- No. 18: [Cyberspace Challenges to Racism and Hate](#)
- No. 18: [Raising Hell With Email](#)
- No. 20: [Media Online](#)
- No. 20: [A Tool Kit of Media Tips](#)
- No. 20: [Freedom of Information in Cyberspace](#)
- No. 22: [Atoms in Cyberspace](#)
- No. 25: [A Look at Lists](#)
- No. 26: [The Value of Freeware](#)
- No. 27: [Technology Tools for Empowerment](#)
- No. 28: [More Technology Tools for Empowerment](#)
- No. 31: [Power to the People Online](#)
- No. 31: [Digital Postcards from the Epidemic](#)
- No. 33: [Pictures and Words](#)
- No. 38: [Preparing for the Millennium](#)
- No. 39: [Post That Protest](#)
- No. 43: [Virtual Tools for Human Rights](#)
- No. 44: [Making the Most of Lists](#)

Major Areas: < [Our Future](#) >< [Virtual Activist Training Guide](#) >< [Search](#) >
 Our Writing: < [Broadband Briefings](#) >< [NetAction Notes](#) >< [Archives](#) >
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